Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

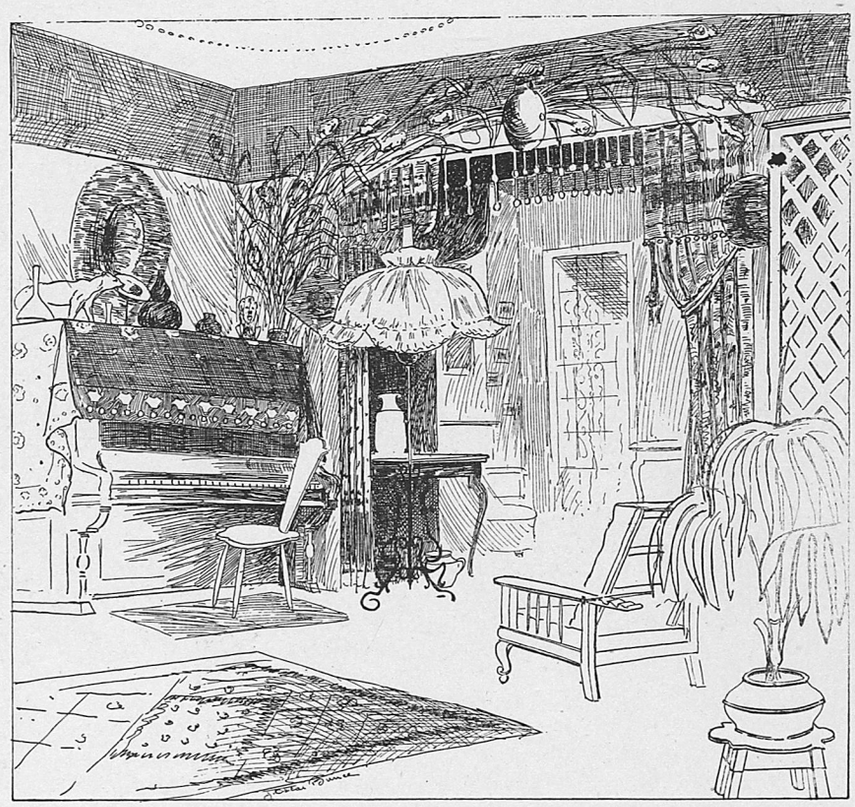
Read more about Early Journal Content at http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE ART OF THE METAL WORKER.

By Mrs. Oliver Bell Bunce.

IN THE big city of New York there are geniuses of whom the public knows but little—in all sorts of trades—geniuses who "hide their light under a bushel," and men of talent who give their whole lives to the study of art and science. Such is John Van Oost, the metal worker, the wood-carver, the manipulator in bone and ivory, the decorator of ceilings, the designer in gold and silver, whose inner life is one of thought, of purpose, and whose aims are in advance of the age. On a top floor of a cosey, yet artistic home, there are rooms which serve as a workshop for this clever man and his partner, Miss Lily Marshall, and where most of their working hours are spent, where sketches are made, where designs of good patterns are created, and where articles in gold, silver and brass, chip and wood-carving are done. Tools are arranged in careful precision at the back of the working-tables, stands for files, hammers and planishing tools, plane and saws, sandbags, forges—in fact, all the machinery which constitute the smoothing and completing, and, after the designing, the coloring; then the finishing of those rare arts so well known in the decorative world, as art and science. Charming devices which catch the eye and which show, behind these tracings and traceries, the hand of the master. Where, from a bit of metal or wood which is roughness itself, crude in its looks, there come forth gold and silver church decorations, candelabras, spoons in every form, lorgnettes, bon-bon boxes, lamps, bracelets, brooches and a host of novelties too numerous to mention. Where, from brass, is made armor, plaques of immense size, fruit-bowls, sconces, jardinières, ash and pin-trays, and every sort of brass furniture and ornamentation that makes for all those who possess it a charm and a pleasure in those rare specimens where art and science take the lead.



Interior of the Van Oost Studios, New York City.

Mr. Van Oost is a Hollander, and in appearance reminds one of the Duch painters. He asserts: "My first idea of metals and their possibilities must have been when I was a little boy. I used to visit the shop of my uncle, who was a learned man of research in science; for it was he who made the design for the Paisley shawl.

"As my mind turned in this direction, and being always in an art atmosphere, I naturally became interested in these curious methods of the workings of metals, which were carefully watched and digested, feeling sure that the day would come in which a profession had to be chosen, and this one, above all others, seemed to appeal to me. And so, for eighteen years, have I studied the colorings of metals, and after much thought, much labor, and very often in despair; thinking that perhaps all my efforts would prove fruitless, in the silent hours in the workshop, at last there came to me the true way to color brass—to produce on these dull bits of metal iridescent effects, to give to these inanimate objects the semblance of a picture, a mingling of tones and tints and hues which harmonized, which, by shade and light, would bring in all its radiance a fine ensemble, making for all places a splendid device, a superb plan."

Mr. Van Oost declares "that all through life the useful is not considered; that the ware so common to us all, which has done its duty for years in one direction and then in another, naturally is laid aside, fit only to be disposed of, broken or burnt up, or cast into some hiding-place, where, after months of neglect, it becomes a thing of the past."

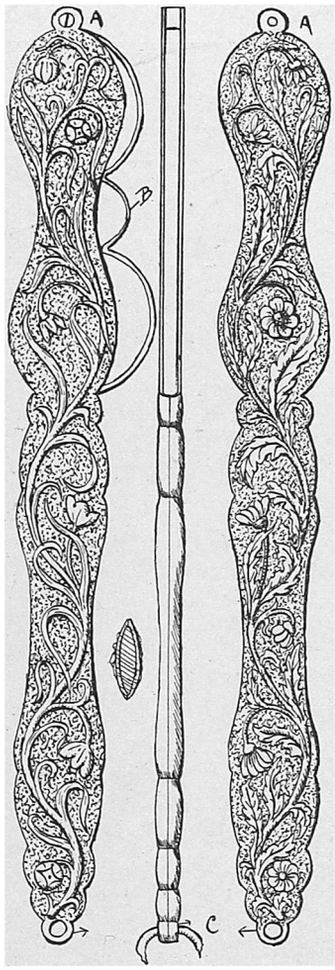
This artist and man of science now for years has put into practice what he preaches. He affirms "that at any time any object, which apparently has no value, can be given new life. It can be created over again, be made to take a new form, and, when that form has been recreated, it will become more artistic than ever, and just as useful." So with the box which has held the vanilla extracts, when the bottles have been sold, and the small pine affair of no account; he then gathers up, and, by the aid of a tool and the intellect of a wood-carver, it becomes the most beautiful of tea-caddies, carved, ornamented, Eastern in effect, and has all the qualities of an imported article, just as beautiful in tone, just as fine in finish.

Even the bones of animals are used in this up-stairs workshop. They are ground until they reach a state of whiteness ivory-like in character, and are made into vases, napkin-rings, pretty trifles in which the master hand knows well how to form these simple shapes,

where sometimes on each piece a story is told, a picture given.

Now this chip or notch carving, we all know, is not a new art. It is old — centuries old. The ancient Egyptians made for their monuments a certain kind of chip carving, which, for a little work, gained a great success, and obtained for those who admired it fine examples in stone and wood, which have lasted for years, and come down to us as wonders to be placed in our museums and galleries of art, and books have been written with innumerable illustrations, giving to the world at large what was supposed to be a dead art.

To be an artificer in metals of any kind a knowledge of chemistry is a necessity; how to deal with acids; in what way fluids act when certain glowing effects are to be produced, and now this artist is reaching, we are told, a plane where he is making new discoveries all the time.



Lorgnette in Brass or Silver Repousée. From the Van Oost Studios, New York City.

But, like all geniuses, they are pretty sure in time to find a helpmeet.

When a very young man—for he is yet only now in his thirties—he fell in love with a bright English girl, the daughter of an English gentleman who lived in the north of England.

So, like all enthusiastic couples, they resolved, if possible, to visit America. It was finally settled that their honeymoon should be spent in a strange land, and so charmed were they with the freedom, the advantages of this new country, that they never returned, but made it their home.

In a little while Mrs. Van Oost sent for her sisters, who were motherless girls and needed her protection. And this is really the way Miss Marshall, so well-known as a writer, a painter on china and a worker of designs on metals, became the pupil of her talented brother-in-law. She had acquired in England a good, solid education, and had applied herself as a student in the art of embroidery, which was taught at a school kept by the sister of the late William Morris.

And so, the metal workers in gold, silver and brass work from morning until night and sometimes far into the early morn. From the first of November until the end of May the work goes on continually, unceasingly. It is one of incessant study. Then, as the days lengthen and the summer advances, these artists fly away to the fields, to the seaside, to make sketches of water views, flowers, marine shells, and all forms which the open air holds.

Later, designs are perfected, and so, when the work time sets in, the plans for the season ripe, the colorings of metals, the triumphs in hammered brass, of gold and silver in *repousee* and chased, in carvings of all kinds of wood, in ivory and bone are made, and when finished, wrapped and boxed they find their way on the other side of the water.

In the making of a piece of armor this able chemist is in his element. He handles the big pieces of brass with affectionate regard; he becomes then a painter in black and white, for he has conceived and sketched the study which he is to work from.

The metal is artistically hammered and put into shape, and from that point the rest is done with the eye of an expert. By its form, its pores, he has in a measure given life to the limbs, and, being a man of magnetism, each piece, each part, is so well put together that it needs only the divine spark to set it breathing.

As a family the Van Oost household are an individual set of people. Each one has a career of some sort; one sister is a writer on special subjects; another contributes to many of the magazines; another is perfecting herself in singing. But they desire not notoriety. They have always belonged to that art atmosphere, and know no other.

On the first floor are their studios, which are artistically and comfortably furnished; candelabras of good patterns hang against the wall; gourds in different objects decorate the mantel-shelf. There are pictures framed and unframed, while above the folding-doors there are branches of rushes with thin leaves and stems, which really form the focus of the room.

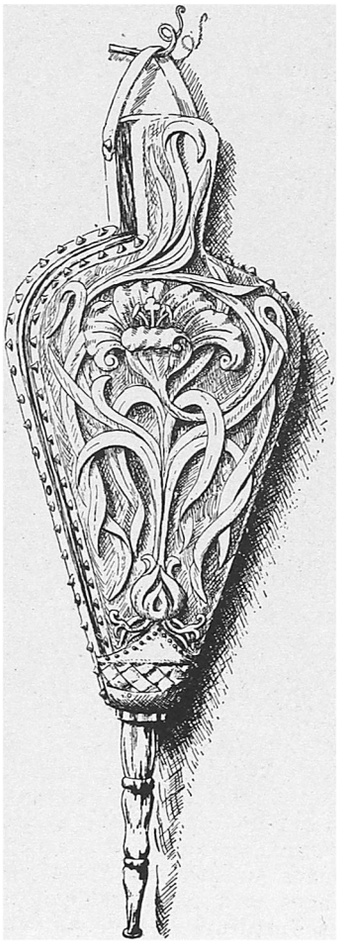
To the eye there is a gathering of queer pieces everywhere—a stand covered with ancient lace, whose lower part is used as a tea-table, boxes of chip carving, a mandolin here, a guitar there.

Pictures side by side form for the hall a decorated bit. A chair in wood-carving by Mr. Van Oost.

But with these metal workers it is the art of long ago that their art belongs to—an art which the ideal craftsman gave in the olden days—where a turn, a twist, a line, meant something, and where those artists of the past thought that the simpler forms were the only forms of true decoration.

Mr. Van Oost is an exhibitor of the Architecture League. He has medals from the World's Fair, certificates which he can show for fine designing; a member of the Arts and Crafts, that excellent body so well known in London, and it is through them that many of his best works are exhibited.

His partner and confrère, Miss Marshall, is well known as a writer, whose work often finds its way into the art magazines. Study and thought are the true aims of these artistic workers.



Decorative Bellows. From the Van Oost Studios, New York City.